

The asylum backlog – and the NHS waiting list

The Prime Minister has made clear Ministerial wishes. The asylum backlog of cases must be brought down. The NHS waiting lists must be reduced. Secretaries of State working within the relevant departments have reinforced these message and gone through plans with senior officials.

Large extra sums of money have been allocated to the NHS budgets, and specific additions added to cut waiting lists. There has been a surge in spending on asylum seekers, their lawyers, claim processing and their care. Ministers have not cut budgets or refused extra money when needed.

Staff numbers in the NHS have risen substantially in the last three years. There has been a major recruitment of more people to process asylum claims more recently. So why are the trends still going in the wrong directions? How much of this is down to Ministers, and what should we expect of well paid senior managers in the NHS and the Home Office now they have a clear Ministerial direction, extra money and extra staff?

Of course asylum claims need to be carefully assessed, to be fair and to avoid more legal challenges. They also need to be conducted with commonsense. Why were so any Albanian claims allowed to build up, and why were so many granted rights to stay when it is a safe country? Other Eruopean countries were firmer and quicker in saying No. Why can't the staff prioritise the many easier cases from safe countries and get on with making the decisions? It is not fair on the individual to keep them in a hotel for a couple of years and then to tell them No. They should be told much earlier. It is also important not to delay unduly difficult cases where the answer is going to be Yes, as they have suffered already and would like to be put out of the uncertainty of waiting to hear how their case has been treated.

Either the management needs help from Ministers with better incentives to clear these backlogs, or it needs changing.